

OLOMPALI STATE HISTORIC PARK, NATURAL LANDSCAPE &
BURDELL GARDEN & GROUNDS

Olompali State Historic Park

U.S. Highway 101

Novato vicinity

Marin County

California

HALS CA-4

CA-4

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

ADDENDUM TO:
OLOMPALI STATE HISTORIC PARK, MARY BURDELL GARDEN
Olompali State Historic Park
U.S. Highway 101
Novato vicinity
Marin County
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HALS CA-4
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

MARY BURDELL GARDEN OLOMPALI STATE HISTORIC PARK

HALS NO. CA-4

- Location:** Marin County, California
The Burdell garden is located within the boundaries of the 700 acre Olompali State Historic Park. The abandoned garden is situated to the east of the ruins of the Burdell residence adjacent to the original entry road to the estate. The park is accessed from Highway 101 and the garden and adjacent building complex are situated in close proximity to the park entrance off the highway. The overall landscape is characterized by rolling hills, grassland, native oaks, and to the east marsh land associated with the Petaluma River.
Lat: 38.15254 Long: -122.57064
- Present Owner:** California Department of Parks and Recreation
1416 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
- Present Occupant:** California Department of Parks and Recreation
- Present Use:** California State Park
- Significance:** The Mary Burdell Victorian Garden is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C, as an example of a formal Victorian garden design. It represents the distinctive characteristics and aesthetics advocated by garden designers and horticulturists of the period 1850-1890 such as Andrew Jackson Downing and was one of the earlier gardens of this type to be designed in the Bay Area. The garden was developed under the direction of Mary Black Burdell, the owner of Rancho Olompali in Marin County, California. In the 19th century the garden and its adjacent residential complex lay at the heart of an 8,800 acre agricultural property which is now an expansive State Historic Park. Olompali was representative of the Bay Area estates developed by many wealthy Californians in the late 19th century which generally exhibited a residential “core” with a main house, auxiliary buildings, a wide entry path, and

formal landscaping. These estates were surrounded by working agricultural land that often included orchards, pasturage and vineyards. The period of significance is 1866-1874, the period in which the garden was constructed, and 1911, the year that Mary Burdell's son, James, extensively remodeled the existing house into a twenty-four room mansion that bore little resemblance to the Victorian wood frame house of his parents. The James Burdell house continued to incorporate portions of the original Camilo Ynitia adobe. James made additions and alterations to the original garden. While a number of formal Victorian gardens were developed in the Bay Area in the late 19th century, very few remain, with the Burdell garden representing a rare surviving example. Factors ranging from cost and labor intensiveness to dramatic changes in taste resulted in many of these designed landscapes either being removed or so substantially altered that their Victorian design aesthetic has been completely lost. Although the Burdell garden has become naturalized over a number of years, the design and planting patterns of the garden continue to be identifiable and it retains many of its major architectural features and a number of elements of its historic plant palate.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical

History: Mary Burdell Garden 1866-1874

Mary Black Burdell began the design and construction of the formal garden in 1866, shortly after she and her husband, Galen, established their permanent residence at the Olompali estate.

Unfortunately no papers have survived in the form of letters, diaries, or daybooks that provide written documentation regarding the Olompali garden. Although its physical layout and development have been very well documented in photographs, we know little about the personal motivation, inspirations, or horticultural knowledge that guided Burdell. We also know little in regard to any professional help Burdell may have had in designing her garden. It is clear that a garden of the size and complexity of the one at Olompali required a substantial staff of gardeners working under knowledgeable supervision. A well-educated woman, Mary Burdell may have gained information from the many publications of the times. She certainly had access to a wide range of nurseries, trained nurserymen and public gardens in the Bay Area. Given her social status,

she was no doubt familiar with the San Francisco gardens of the city's elite and may well have known about or visited some of the private estates in Marin and the Peninsula. We know that she was friends with Mercedes Call who maintained a less formal, but substantial garden at Fort Ross. Maria Sweetser, the friend with whom she traveled to Japan in 1874 also maintained a specimen garden.¹ Whatever her immediate influences, the garden at Olompali stands as a testament to Burdell's sophistication, taste, and awareness of Victorian garden philosophy and aesthetics.

Mary Black Burdell owned the Rancho Olompali from 1863 until her death in 1900. The major elements of the garden were constructed between 1866 and 1874 and embody the essential design characteristics of the Victorian garden described above that had gained currency in the Bay Area beginning in the 1850s. Although now subject to invasive trees and other plants growth, the Burdell garden retains important elements of its original design. The garden at Olompali remains one of the few examples of this type of garden that has survived in the Bay Area and California.

Mary Black was born into a wealthy Anglo/Californio family in 1845. Her father, James Black, Jr., had been put off ship in Monterey in 1832 to recover from typhoid fever. Following his recovery, Black, took up residence in Marin County in 1834, where he benefited from Mariano Vallejo's efforts to stave off the Russian penetration of the Northern California coast in the 1840s. With Vallejo's backing, Black received a 10,787 acre grant from the Mexican government near Bodega Bay, an area of Russian settlement. In 1848 he traded this land for 9,479 acres in Nicasio (Marin County). Continuing to acquire land throughout his life, Black was the largest landholder in Marin at the time of his death in 1870. As a part of his vast holdings he purchased the Rancho Olompali in 1852. The rancho had originally been granted to Camilo Ynitia, the only northern Native Californian to secure a land grant from the Mexican government that was later confirmed by the United States Government. In addition to agricultural land, Black's purchase included Ynitia's adobe house and other improvements, as well as the remains of one of the largest Native American villages in the Marin area.²

¹ Martin, Leigh, "Women's Victorian Gardens in Northern California," unpublished Master's Thesis, Sonoma State University, 1999, 75.

² Carlson, Pamela and E. Breck Parkman, "An Exceptional Adaptation: Camilo Ynitia," California History, Dec. 1986, 238. Research and archeological investigation have led to the conclusion that the adobe

Mary Black led the life of the privileged daughter of an upper class family of substantial wealth. She was educated at boarding school in San Jose, and at eighteen, married Galen Burdell, the first dentist to practice in San Francisco. As a wedding present in 1863, James Black gave his daughter the Rancho Olompali, although the young couple continued to reside in San Francisco until 1866.

In 1866 the Burdell's moved to Olompali. They constructed a house which enclosed Camilo Ynitia's adobe within wood cladding and created a substantial second-story frame addition to the rear of the existing house. Although a comfortable size, the house might best be described as an unpretentious picturesque country dwelling of the type recommended by Andrew Jackson Downing in his *Architecture of Country Houses*, (1851). Galen Burdell left his dental practice and occupied himself full-time with the management of the ranch and with his many horticultural interests. Between 1870 and 1874 Mary Burdell was engaged with extensive litigation that resulted from her father's death. As the result of a tragic accident that had occurred several years earlier, James Black disinherited his daughter, forcing her into several years of court battles to secure her inheritance. In 1874, the court awarded half of her father's Nicasio Ranch and substantial other holdings to Mary Burdell.

It is not clear precisely when Mary Burdell began to develop her garden, although the first few years at Olompali must have been consumed to a great extent with the construction of the house. The house appears to have been completed by 1870, and photographs circa that date indicate that the garden was well underway by this time.³ It seems most likely that landscaping around the house and plans for the garden were begun in the late 1860s and that formal garden continued to be elaborated into the mid-1870s following Mary Burdell's trip to Japan. The year 1874, in which the garden was extensively photographed, appears to have represented a

acquired by Black was the second adobe house built by Ynitia. The precise location of the first adobe has never been precisely determined. The second adobe dates from at least 1837.

³ California Department of Parks and Recreation, Photo Archives, photographs 106-; 105-17;114-11 show terracing below the entry drive, lawn, plantings and gravel paths, a sprinkling system and a circa 200 year old transplanted sago palm.

“culmination” of sorts in which the garden took on the form that it more-or-less maintained until late in Mary Burdell’s life.⁴

The garden and the residential compound form a single unified entity that was visually and functionally related. The ornamental garden was sited to the east of the main house with the entry and views from the front windows and porch oriented to the garden. Consistent with the tenets of Victorian landscape design, the entry drive culminated at the front of the house which had a large inviting porch suitable for sitting and entertaining. To the south of the house was an open graded and terraced area that contained the more utilitarian garden spaces, including a large glass house and a “field” used for the growing of vegetables. A kitchen herb garden also was located on the south side of the house. At the rear of the complex there was a two story building, circa 1870, which was built for Mary Joynson, James Black’s niece. She and her husband lived with Black until 1870. Following their return to England, the building appears to have been used for storage on the lower story and possibly for office or residency space on the second.⁵

At its height the garden incorporated the essential elements of the Victorian garden. Two rockeries provided focal points, the largest having a spectacular spraying fountain enhanced with sculpted cranes. These organized the garden along a north-south axis with curving paths encircling the perimeter of the garden. A gazebo marked the north end of the garden with a pond and bottle brush hedge marking its southern extent. Exotic specimen plantings and ribbon beds were present in abundance. Gentle terracing enhanced the views of the garden from the adjacent residence. A large conservatory to the southwest of the house served to cultivate planting materials.

The formal ornamental garden was bounded by Burdell Creek and the 19th century entry road on the north, by the main drive in front of the house on the west and by an extensive pomegranate hedge that extended beyond the garden to border the terraced area of the vegetable garden and glass house.

⁴ Photographs clearly datable to the 1880s and 1900 show some changes in hardscape elements, however these are relatively minor and do not alter the essential form of the garden. Of course growth and senescence of plant materials is a constant process in a garden, even one which is meticulously maintained.

⁵ Department of Parks and Recreation, personal communication with District Historian, Marianne Hurley, September 11, 2007.

This hedge functioned to tie the ornamental and the utilitarian portions of the garden together and outlined the circulation path that led around the south side of the formal garden and provided access to the conservatory and large farm building at the rear of the residential complex. On the east the border of the garden was less finite, distinguished by an informal line of border trees that separated the garden from the Petaluma River marsh and a small bank that resulted from the construction of the garden terrace. Galen Burdell reclaimed much of the marsh into agricultural production in the 1870s.

The ornamental garden was approximately 300 X 150 feet, organized along an axial path running north-south. A number of smaller curvilinear paths crossed this central axis, leading the visitor to wander among specimen plantings, both individual examples and groupings of plants, and to architectural features that provided focal or destination points within the garden. Although there were several paths, the primary pattern consisted of two large roughly circular paths that moved around the major and minor rockeries. A third smaller circle encompasses the pond in the southeast corner of the garden. The paths were graveled. The central path was slightly wider than the curved paths. At the north end of the garden the central path commenced at a gazebo and ended at the smaller of two rockeries to the south.

The garden was created in an area of sloping pasture that extended from the entry road east towards the marsh. This area was terraced to create a large flat area of approximately one acre in size. This primary terrace has engineered side slopes on the west and south and somewhat less engineered slopes on the east. The creation of this large flat area would have been a sizable task in the 1860s when most of the cut and fill and leveling would have been done by hand.

The south and west engineered slope dropped from the level of the road and house to the level of the primary garden terrace and defined the edges of the garden. This slope was covered with grass. There were two access points consisting of wooden steps from the road down the terrace; one stair was located just slightly north of the entry portico of the house and the other across from the lawn to the south of the house. Terracing was also present around the two rockeries. A common device in the Victorian garden, the sloping terrace, in addition to delineating the boundary of the

formal garden, enhanced the vistas from the house. At a slightly lower elevation than the house, the garden could better be seen and its design comprehended from that vantage point. The elevated circular terracing around the rockeries helped to emphasize these important garden features. To the east of the large rockery, a less pronounced terrace dropped down to the garden edge.

Several prominent architectural elements are employed to create visual focal points at a distance and destinations within the garden itself. The two most important quasi-architectural features are the rockeries. A ubiquitous feature of the Victorian garden, rockeries were creations of rough stone usually arranged in a pyramidal shape. At Olompali the largest of the rockeries was an impressive pyramid of andesite rock which is suggestive of a grotto. This feature measured forty-five feet in diameter. The rock creation sat in a round pool with a raised edge and was plumbed to send a cascade of water into the air from the top. Following Mary Burdell's trip to Japan in 1874, two large bronze cranes were added. Early photographs of the garden show both cranes set in the rockery, but later one was moved and placed on the lawn. Set slightly off the main axial path and on a direct axis from the north garden entry, there is little doubt that in a garden with several features, the large rockery had pride of place. It was elaborate, carefully crafted, and with the crane statuary and cascading water no doubt created a spectacular effect. Although rockeries were very popular and many models appeared in garden books and horticultural publications of the time, it has been suggested that Mary Burdell may have drawn her design directly from the rock grotto at the Convent of Notre Dame in San Jose where she attended school. The school grotto was modeled on that of Lourdes and was part of a larger ornamental Victorian garden. It is quite possible that both the fountain feature, as well as other aspects of the Olompali garden, may have been inspired by the convent to which Mary Burdell had early and lengthy exposure as a child and adolescent.

The smaller rockery provided the termination point of the axial path through the garden. Although smaller than the other rockery, it was nonetheless a very distinctive element. Also pyramidal in shape, it sat on a leveled circular terrace surrounded by a circular gravel path that visually outlined the feature and allowed for circulation completely around it. This in turn was ringed by a hedge further emphasizing the feature.

The gazebo and the pond anchored the garden at either end. Visually less dramatic than the rockeries, they were nonetheless essential parts of a Victorian garden. The siting of the gazebo at the northern terminus of the central path made it a place of rest and contemplation with visual access to three of the garden's major features. The structure provided a straight sightline to the southern rockery, while at an angle to the west one had a clear view of the exotic banana and palm grove and to the east the large rockery could be enjoyed from a comfortable and shaded resting place. By contrast, the pond, presumably created from a spring-fed cattle watering pond dating to Camilo Ynitia's time, was tucked into the southeastern corner, sheltered from immediate view by plantings of shrubs and trees.⁶ In strolling the garden this must have acted as surprise element encountered by following the curved path leading off of the small rockery.

The entry stairs into the garden leading off the drive were classical in form with large square newel posts at the top and bottom. These were capped with a restrained capital. There was a low banding along the stair, but no balustrade. The effect of the stair was to create a more formal entry into the garden than had previously been the case. This may well have been the last major design element added to the garden during Mary Burdell's lifetime.

In the typical Victorian mode, the ornamental garden made substantial use of exotic vegetation. Perhaps the most exotic planting was the grove of banana and palm near the northern entry into the garden. Various types of palms, including California and Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera* and *robusta*) and conifers, including Monterey Pine and Cypress were planted separately, each displayed as an individual specimen to be appreciated in its own right, rather than for any picturesque effect achieved through plant groupings. A line of various species of conifers and somewhat less prominent oleanders bordered the east side of the main path. Some of trees, such as the Sago Palm in the driveway circle were transplanted as large mature plants. The ability to acquire and successfully cultivate these types of specimens was a clear statement of the Burdell's economic status. Bedding plantings were used in the garden, but we know little about their composition. The most clearly documented

⁶ Ibid.

bed was a ribbon planting between the terrace from the road and the central garden path immediately south of the northern entry stair. The planting in this location could easily be enjoyed from the vantage point of the house.

A number of plantings of Asian origin were found in the garden. These included Japanese Maples, Hinoki False Cypress, Japanese Cypress, Fuschia, Oriental Arbovitae, Camphor Tree, Japanese Cypress, and Mourning Cypress (*chamaecyparis funebris*). The use of these plants reflects their general popularity in gardens of the period, their increasing availability in the Bay Area, and Burdell's own trip to Japan in 1874. While the Olompali garden never incorporated what could properly be described as a western interpretation of a Japanese garden, there is little doubt that Burdell's horticultural tastes were strongly influenced and refined by her trip and subsequently reflected in an Asian aesthetic in her garden. Whether she acquired plant specimens in Japan or relied on existing sources in the Bay Area is of less importance than her selection of these materials and their employment in the overall landscape.

The area to the south of the house was both separate from and integral to the ornamental garden. With its large lawn, terraces, pole pergola, pomegranate hedge, and flagpole, it repeated design elements of the formal garden. Among the buildings at the rear of this area, the glass house was most clearly related to the propagation and maintenance of the formal landscape. This element is present by the mid-1870s and appears to have undergone several changes and additions over the years. It is appreciably larger by the turn-of-the-20th-century than in the 1870s and eventually acquired decorative side gables and a ridge rail along the main axis of the roof. The conservatory was purchased from George Aston of San Francisco, who described himself as a "horticultural builder." This essential part of the Victorian Garden appeared to have provided the Burdell's with satisfaction in as much as Mary's husband, Galen, provided an endorsement to Aston Company.

The area north of the house was occupied by large trees including native oaks and bays, as well as introduced species such as Mourning Cypress, Chestnut, and Japanese Maple. A trellis near the house was prominent feature. Here the landscape is less formal than in the garden or the south side of the house and merges at its periphery with the natural landscape.

The Olompali Victorian Garden after 1900

Mary and Galen's son James inherited Olompali following his mother's death in 1900. In 1911 he built a new house which largely replaced the frame house, but continued to incorporate the Camilo Ynitia adobe within its walls. An interesting experiment in early modernist architecture, designed by a local builder, the house re-oriented the entry and vistas in relation to the formal garden. The arrival point from the entry drive was shifted to the north, while a large portico with French doors opened onto the south. A second-story veranda also looked south.

As a consequence of this re-orientation, James developed a garden to the south in the large open area which in his parent's time had been maintained as a lawn, sometime vegetable garden and maintenance area for the formal garden. Here he established two very elaborate bedding areas with circular paths around them. Executed in a high Victorian style at a time when tastes in gardening were dramatically changing, James' installations lack the integration and aesthetic coherence that characterized the design of his mother's garden. He also enlarged the glass house, a reflection of his reliance on bedding plants.

At the same time he seems to have only maintained the formal ornamental garden in the areas close to the house. He replaced the two wooden entry stairs with a single large stone stair that provided access from the portico of the new house.⁷ He also maintained the ribbon bedding area below the first terrace and the large rockery. But the gazebo, small rockery, and the central axial path seem to have suffered from neglect. The elm border at the eastern boundary began to encroach into that side of the garden with the consequence that the canopy was increasingly enlarged and some of the formal circulation and architectural elements were increasingly obscured.

While most Victorian gardens in the Bay Area either succumbed to changing tastes, rising land values and subdivision, the basic design and structure of the Burdell garden remained largely intact through subsequent owners. Without maintenance, the principal issue became the spread of volunteer plants and the disintegration of some of the more fragile

⁷ It is very possible that by this time the wooden stairs had rotted.

architectural elements. Although the presence of the Victorian garden is not immediately discernable to the viewer many of its major structural elements are still present as is remnant vegetation and clear patterns of original plantings. It remains one of the only surviving examples of the gardens of the 1870 period.

Historical

Context: The Victorian Garden in California

The development of Victorian ornamental garden in California began very shortly after the Gold Rush and was concentrated in San Francisco and the Bay Area. It is possible that the first ornamental garden to be cultivated in San Francisco was that of Sarah Gillespie, who with her husband, Charles Gillespie, arrived in the city in 1848. She established a garden around her home on Chestnut Street where she cultivated some of the earliest plant introductions from China and Australia. By 1853 her garden boasted a greenhouse and her flowers were being recognized at the first flower shows in the state.⁸

As the principal port on the Pacific Coast, San Francisco was ideally located to act as the entry point for plants coming from the Orient, South America, and Australia. Access to a wide variety of new and exotic species, in addition to a mild Mediterranean climate, a growing population, and the wealth of the city, encouraged an interest in gardening and promoted the development of a thriving nursery trade. In 1854, William Connell Walker advertised the availability of camellias and japonicas, as well as a variety of shrubs and trees from his greenhouse and nursery at 4th and Folsom Street.⁹ By 1859 he had 20,000 plants in pots.¹⁰ But Walker was not alone. In 1856 James O'Donnell established the Mountain View Nursery in San Jose, Juan Centre ran the Commercial Nursery near Mission Dolores, and close by Henry Sontag operated the Pacific Nursery. In the same neighborhood, Miller and Sievers' Mission Street Nursery had ten greenhouses and a conservatory in which they cultivated the giant water lily, *Victoria regia*, which had, only a few years

⁸ Taylor, Judith, M.D., *Tangible Memories: Californians and their Gardens 1800-1950* (Privately Published, 2003), 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰ Walker's 1858-1859 catalogue was obtained by Harry Butterfield, for many years at the cooperative extension service of the University of California, and an avid collector of information on early California horticulture. Butterfield's notes, including his typescript of Walker's catalogue are in the Special Collections of the Shields Library at U.C. Davis.

earlier, been the sensation of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London.¹¹ Between the 1850s and the 1870s, the number of nurseries grew significantly throughout the Bay Area with important growers and merchants in Oakland, Berkeley, San Jose, the Santa Clara Valley and Napa-Sonoma. Perhaps the best known of these was the nursery established by Luther Burbank in Santa Rosa in 1878.¹² Judith Taylor, in her history of California gardens, notes sixty-four nurseries in the greater Bay Area between the 1850s and 1880s. Many of these provided not only plants, but professional design services as a part of their businesses.

The expansion of horticultural literature in the Victorian period no doubt had an influence on California garden of the late 19th century. The works of major English writers such as J.C. Loudon, whose monumental *Encyclopedia of Gardening* (1822) was an essential resource for horticulturalists, was widely available in the U.S, as was the work of his wife, Jane, whose *Gardening for Ladies*, enjoyed considerable popularity. For those not directly familiar with Loudon's work, his ideas regarding design and landscape gardening were incorporated into the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing, the American architect and horticulturist. Downing's *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1841) was the first American book devoted entirely to the subject of landscape gardening.¹³ Downing sought to elevate the taste of his readers, instructing them in the proper elements of design in both house and garden. In addition to his books, heavily illustrated with lithographs, Downing published the *Horticulturist*, a periodical that helped publicize his ideas. Other American publications, such as the *Genesee Farmer and Gardener's Journal* and the *California Farmer* (established 1854) provided gardeners with information and ideas regarding landscape and plant cultivation. By 1873 there was sufficient interest and market to support a book store on Montgomery Street in San Francisco that advertised that it kept "...constantly on hand a large assortment of books on Landscaping, Agriculture, Horticulture and Botany."¹⁴ The catalogues of nurseries, both local, and distant "seed houses," kept gardeners informed of new plant introductions. Attesting to the interest in gardening

¹¹ Carter, 78.

¹² Taylor, 284.

¹³ Martin, 36.

¹⁴ Catalogue New York Seed Warehouse, San Francisco, 1873

the *San Francisco Bulletin* offered new subscribers in the 1870s promotional gifts of seeds and trees.¹⁵

Flower shows and public gardens played an important role in popularizing gardening and in providing models of design and display. The first flower show in California was held in San Francisco in 1853. Shortly after that, James Lafayette Warren, a Sacramento nurseryman, was instrumental in getting the state to establish a horticultural board and agricultural commission and in organizing the State Fair.¹⁶ Public gardens, parks and cemeteries also heightened awareness of plants and garden design. Notable among these in the Bay Area were the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted, in 1863, Golden Gate Park begun in 1870, and Woodward's Gardens, a public pleasure ground that occupied a large site at 13th and Mission Streets that opened in the 1860s. Woodward's exhibited many elements of the proper Victorian garden including curvilinear gravel paths, water features, specimen plantings, especially examples of various palms and conifers, and glass houses. The garden, surrounded by a hedge of Monterey cypress, could be visited for twenty-five cents.¹⁷ Golden Gate Park, by far the largest example of landscape design in the Bay Area was begun in 1870 under the direction of William Hammond Hall. John McLaren who replaced Hall as Park superintendent, introduced more formal Victorian garden elements into the park with raised planting beds and floral displays. Most importantly, he was responsible for the great conservatory that has been recently restored and is known as the Hall of Flowers.¹⁸

During this same period, wealthy individuals undertook the development of private gardens, both in the city and as accompaniments to their country houses and estates. San Francisco was a city of great wealth derived from mining, railroad development, processing and manufacture, finance, and international trade. During the 1870s and 1880s palatial mansions were built in the sunny Mission District and atop Nob Hill. Many of these were set on large urban lots and surrounded by carefully landscape grounds. The gardens of James Phelan on Valencia Street, circa 1875, were of

¹⁵ Taylor, 57.

¹⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷ Taylor, 58.

¹⁸ Taylor, 65; San Francisco Library photographic collection. The first conservatory burned in 1883 and was replaced by the current building.

particular note. The reform city mayor had a strong interest in horticulture which was expressed in a large rose garden, a cherry orchard and a display of weeping willows which caused considerable comment.¹⁹ Likewise, the Latham residence on Folsom Street, the Cole residence at Franklin and Sacramento Streets, and the deYoung home on California Street, all exhibited manicured landscapes designed in the Victorian mode. They were characterized by curvilinear drives and paths, water features, specimen trees, palms, statuary and elaborate bedding areas.²⁰ The largest and most spectacular of these gardens belonged to Adolph Sutro, whose Sutro Heights residence was surrounded by an introduced urban forest, a palm lined entry road and acres of formal flower beds which were opened to the public. In addition, Sutro maintained a private conservatory with a substantial collection of rare tropical plants and acquired the library of Joseph Banks, the well-known 18th century botanist.²¹ In Sacramento the grounds of the state capital, completed in 1860s, were carefully landscaped in the Victorian style. Terraces stepping down from the building were planted with widely spaced individual coniferous specimen trees. This formal arrangement of plantings was surrounded by wide pathways intended for strolling. The yearly state fair and flower show which were held in close proximity to the capital grounds gave this landscape wide exposure among nurserymen, horticulturists, and the public.

But the most spectacular examples of the Victorian garden were found outside the city on the Peninsula to the south, in the East Bay, and north of the city in Sonoma and Napa counties. California's newly rich were as interested in the conspicuous display of their wealth as their English and East Coast counterparts. The Stanfords, Crockers, and other merchant princes of San Francisco built large country estates in San Mateo County where they entertained, maintained horses, and established large imposing formal gardens. A number of these gardens were designed by Bay area nurserymen, including those of D.O. Mills in Millbrae, William Ralston and John Parrott.²² These estates incorporated many of the characteristic elements of Victorian garden design. Ralston's garden was known for its

¹⁹ Ibid, 62.

²⁰ Britton and Rey, *Artistic Homes of California*, circa 1887. Images reproduced in the on-line collections of the San Francisco Public Library, <http://webbie1.sfpl.org>.

²¹ Taylor, 75.

²² Taylor, 79-81. A landscaper named Elliot designed Mills' garden in 1865; Parrott's by Stephan Nolan.

extensive terracing, with each step accented by green Chinese vases planted with geraniums. George Howard's Burlingame garden, developed in 1858, had a serpentine graveled drive bordered with shrubbery, espaliered trees and a large collection of ornamental plants. Many contained "exotic" trees that were especially popular in the 1870s and 1880s, including many varieties of palms, redwood, Australian Monkey Puzzle, Cedar of Lebanon and the bunya-bunya (*Aracucaria bidwillii*). Most had large rose plantings and the popular "ribbon beds" of colorful annuals. In addition, most of these large estates included a glass house, often of considerable size, where tropical plants could be protected in bad weather, bedding plants established, and in some cases, orchard crops grafted and hybridized. In the East Bay, John McLaren designed five acres of formal landscape grounds around the Hacienda at the New Almaden mines. To the north of San Francisco, George Butler established large gardens at his "Brighthurst" estate in Kentfield. In San Rafael "Falkirk" was designed by a Boston landscape architect and had a large display of Japanese maples and bamboos.²³

PART II PHYSICAL INFORMATION

Landscape Character and Use:

The garden is a formally designed, though deteriorated, element within a much larger pastoral and natural park landscape. The surrounding landscape is quintessentially Californian – composed of rolling hills, annual grasses that brown in the summer months, and native oak and madrone. The garden is properly a part of the ranch domestic complex. Historically this complex consisted of the Burdell residence, equipment building, glass house, south lawn and kitchen garden, entry and approach road and the formal garden. The domestic ranch complex and formal garden remain closely related and both retain their essential form.

The residential complex is now composed of the ruins of the James Burdell mansion which incorporates portions of the Ynitia adobe. The house burned February 2, 1969 and is now retained in a state of arrested decay. In the 1950s the south garden installed by James Burdell was replaced with a swimming pool, now removed. The large glass house is

²³ Taylor, 267.

no longer in existence. The former two-story equipment building now functions as the State Parks Marin sector office and visitor center and has been renovated on the interior. The engineered terrace which once separated the conservatory and kitchen garden areas is still intact and the flat area to the south of the house ruin is an open grass field bordered on the south by the original pomegranate hedge. The hedge originally demarcated the boundary between the ranch complex and the working fields. This demarcation remains although the fields are now open grassland.

As noted above, the decline of Mary Burdell's formal garden began under the stewardship of James Burdell who placed more emphasis on the formal beds he installed to the south of the 1911 house. He appears to have maintained his mother's formal ornamental garden primarily in the areas close to the house, allowing the more remote parts of the garden begin to naturalize. During his occupation of the property the elm border at the eastern boundary began to encroach into that side of the garden with the consequence that the canopy was increasingly enlarged and some of the formal circulation and architectural elements were increasingly obscured; a condition that has become more marked over time.

Despite the current deteriorated appearance of the garden, essential features of the Mary Burdell design remain. These include the boundary patterns, engineered terrace, slope on the western and southern boundaries, the formal stair added in 1911, the andesite rockeries, and the drained pond with a concrete liner. Several plantings from the original garden also are important remaining features. These include the southern and western pomegranate hedge, Washingtonia palms in the center of the garden, remnant oleander and cedars which originally bordered the central path and Bottle Brush (*Callistemon myrtles*). It is possible that the Washingtonia palms in the garden are the oldest example in the North Bay. In its organization, design, circulation, vegetation, views and vistas, buildings and structures it remains one of only a few examples of a 19th-century Victorian garden still in existence in northern California.

Natural
Features:

Topography

The garden is contained in a sloped area gently descending to the east. On the western boundary the formal garden is recessed below the level of the

Burdell house, ranch building complex, and main entry road. This recessed effect was originally created by terracing along the western and southern boundary of the garden. Currently the slope is still visible but the engineered terracing while still extant, has been softened by erosion and settlement and built up with debris. The topography of the site was significantly altered by the original installation of a formal design, however, the site selection for the garden took advantage of a naturally occurring gentle slope to the east of the house descending beyond the garden boundaries to the marsh land of the Petaluma River.

Vegetation

Vegetation within the garden consists of a number of plants which were original to the Victorian design. These include:

Acer palmatum

Ailanthus altissima

Chamaecyparis funebris

Chamaecyparis obtuse

Cycas revolute

Musa sp

Palm sp

Pinus radiata

Platycladus orietalis

Punica granatum

Robinia pseudoacacia

Rosa banksiae

Sequoia sempervereus

Trachycarpus fortunei

Ulmus procera

Washingtonia robusta and *Washingtonia filifera*

Castanea dentate

Myrtus communis

The most exotic plant types in the original garden, such as the banana plants, could not survive the selective maintenance of the James Burdell ownership and the decades of neglect that followed the end of the Burdell ownership. While many of the original plants have survived, they have become naturalized, the original planting pattern of several is still clearly evident. This is particularly true of the pomegranate hedge, the palms, and the redwood. Sufficient original vegetation survives, along with land

patterns and structures, to convey the general character of the 19th century garden.

Other vegetation, documented in the existing condition plan (2007) have invaded the garden and obscured some of the original layout. Most of the intrusive vegetation can be removed or selectively removed in the interest of rehabilitating the Burdell garden to its period of significance.

Designed

Features:

Land Patterns

The garden is organized on a long north-south axis. The north, south and west boundaries of the garden are still well defined. On the north the creek marks the end of the formal garden. On the south the curved entry drive and pomegranate hedge delineates the formal garden boundary and extends to also demarcate the southern boundary of the ranch complex. Along the western boundary the entry road and terrace provide a strong boundary line. On the east, the boundary is defined by the edge of the principal terrace which forms a straight line and plantings. The elm trees and path which originally demarcated the end of the garden on the marsh and river side of the property has become obscured, but the terracing remains discernable. The path is no longer visible and the elm trees have naturalized creating woodland in place of the original carefully planted tree rows. The overall oblong shape of the garden design is still visible and for the most part retains strong boundaries.

Views and Vistas

The original garden had two important vistas. Within the garden the axial view from the gazebo at the north end to the rockeries was an important view. The gazebo provided a well defined resting or sitting area from which the long line of the garden and its most important structural elements could be observed at leisure.

The porch of the Mary Burdell ranch house provided another important vista down to the formal garden situated at a slightly lesser elevation and on to the marsh and river in the distance. The linear elm grove was sited so that it did not obscure this view. The vista from the house was altered in 1911 with the construction of a new building that faced south toward the former kitchen garden area. At this time the vista to the river definitely became a secondary view, a progression that began with Galen

Burdell's reclamation of marsh land and by the general growth of the garden trees. The existing condition remains similar with the further intrusion of the Highway 101 which runs north –south between the Olompali property and the river.

Water

The creek on the north boundary of the garden is seasonally dry. None of the water features (basins, rockery fountain, and pond) is operative. The pond in the southeast corner of the garden consists of a concrete lined basin. The main rockery retains elements of its plumbing, but in a severely deteriorated condition. The spring that originally fed the fountain is still extant and could be utilized to bring the fountains back into operation.

Buildings and Structures

There are four remaining historic buildings on the property. Although not a part of the formal garden, they are directly adjacent to it and form part of the immediate garden setting. Historically these buildings were part of the ranch domestic complex. One of the buildings, the James Burdell house (1911), has been partially destroyed by fire and is a ruin. The two-story former house/equipment storage building has been altered to accommodate park offices and a visitor center. The third building consists of a small wood frame utility shop. Two small outbuildings to the west of the Burdell Mansion include a small board and batten storage building and a concrete generator shed.

Within the garden proper there are three primary structures, two rockeries in the Victorian design mode and a concrete lined pond. Constructed of andesite rock and pyramidal in shape they remain foci along the north-south axis of the garden although the linear connection between the two elements has been partially lost due to the disintegration of the center garden path and the intrusion of naturalized vegetation. The large rockery retains its major structural design elements, although the statuary associated with it is missing. The smaller rockery is partially collapsed with the upper part of the stonework dislodged and lying on the ground. The foundation of the feature is still in place. The elaborate stair from the entry road into the garden, installed by James Burdell, remains in place and has acquired significance in its own right as a part of the changing history of the garden.

Lost architectural features include the gazebo and the original wooden stairs, trellis at north garden, pole trellis on southeast side of house, flag pole, glass house, and entry gates.

Circulation

The original garden paths are now obscured, but recent archeological work has uncovered extant paths at twelve excavation points within the garden. Further investigation and excavation is needed to determine the extent of the remaining paths, but study to date indicates that there may be significant surviving portions that are now covered with duff and accumulated soil.

Archeological Sites

Olompali State Historic Park is the location of a large and very significant archeological site(s) which includes a major prehistoric and historic Native American village site. The area of the garden and ranch complex has high archeological sensitivity, although there are no prehistoric above-ground archeological features.

The Burdell house ruin, although lacking integrity under Criteria A/1 or C/3 of the National and California Registers, is potentially eligible for listing in the California Register under Criterion D/4 for its potential to yield information important in the early history of California. The Ynitia adobe remnants contained within the framework of the Burdell house ruin date to the Mexican era and are of interest in regard to materials, construction, and other research questions associated with the Mexican and early American period.

The garden, although partially naturalized and lacking some original features, retains its overall integrity and continues to convey the reasons for which it is significant. The garden retains its basic land pattern, organization and relationship to the ranch complex. It has retained its original boundaries, boundary demarcations, terracing, principal architectural features, and important plant materials. Naturalizing plant materials have obscured the pattern of neatly maintained beds, plant groupings and specimen plants that characterized the original garden. However, the major outlines of these design elements can be discerned and could be rehabilitated through selective removal and a program of

maintenance. The setting of the ranch and garden in open space with views to the Petaluma River has survived largely intact despite the properties proximity to urban areas.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Drawings

and Plans: There are no original or period drawings or plans of the garden.

Burdell Gardens and Grounds Project: 1874 Period Plan, PGAdesign, 2007, in the files of the Olompali State Historic Park, Marin County, California.

Burdell Gardens and Ground Project: 1911 Period Plan, PGAdesign, 2007, in the files of the Olompali State Historic Park, Marin County, California.

Burdell Gardens and Grounds Project: 2007 Existing Condition Plan, PGAdesign, 2007, in the files of the Olompali State Historic Park, Marin County, California.

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1855 Map of Survey of Lands Situated Between San Leandro and San Lorenzo Creeks. Map No. 234ND, Page 747. Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley.

Historic

Views and

Photographs: A large number of historic photographs of the garden and ranch complex are on file at the Museum Collections Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, California. This material is proprietary and is available only through the Department.

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Project

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